



Republican Study Committee Chairman Jeb Hensarling's Speech to CPAC February 7, 2008

Thank you for that wonderful introduction. I didn't come here today expecting to talk about presidential politics, but let me just say that I am honored to have the privilege to speak on the same stage as a great conservative leader like Governor Mitt Romney. I know his action today took a great deal of courage and though I might not know him quite as well as some of his supporters here in the audience today, but his commitment to conservative values is inspiration for us all. And I think there is wisdom in his words, that because we love American and because we stand for conservative principles, it is time for us to unite together as a family and ensure that the next President of the United States does not retreat in facing the threat of radical Islamic jihad. Moving forward, I have no doubt that together, that is exactly what we will do.

I want to thank David Keene for his leadership and his vision in bringing us together for the 35th CPAC convention. And while this may sound quite odd to you, I'm very happy to see that there appear to be no CPAC membership application forms. It wasn't all that long ago that I spoke to a LIONS club in one of the rural communities in the 5th congressional district of Texas which I am honored to represent in the House of Representatives. After giving a speech talking about the challenges to the nation and my activities in Washington, I received a nice round of applause and sat down. The president of the club arose to thank me. He then turned to the folks in the room and said, "If everyone will please notice there is a club membership form right in front of you. If each one of you would go out and recruit just one new member, I have no doubt that we could begin to attract interesting speakers."

Ladies and gentlemen, that is a true story.

Although I might have been found a lacking speaker by that LIONS Club president, it is clear that when it comes to the Speaker of the House and her allies, America finds them sadly lacking.

And serving with these folks for a year, I can tell you that Congress is richly deserving of its 18 percent approval rating. As a colleague of mine said the other day, "there is no doubt that 90 percent of Congress is giving the rest of us a bad name."

Last year I was honored to speak before you, yet again in my capacity as Chairman of the Republican Study Committee – the 100+ member conservative caucus bearing the torch of liberty in the House. I spoke of what I thought were the three great threats to our American civilization. Permit me to revisit them

The first, and posing the most immediate danger, is the threat of radical Islam. Each of us should soberly ponder the words of Ayman Al-Zawahri, Al-Qaeda's number two, "Al-Qaeda has the right to kill four million Americans—two million of them children." Ladies and gentlemen, two of those children are mine. And I have no doubt that many of them are yours.

When I came before you a year ago, our Commander-in-Chief had just announced a controversial change in strategy in Iraq – a major battle front in the War against radical Islam. The response from the Democrat party and the overwhelming majority of their Washington representatives was anger, doubt, and calls to cut funding for our troops. And some, like Senator Harry Reid, declared the war already lost.

Because of the steadfast support of the Republicans in Congress, particularly Republican Study Committee members like Congressman Joe Wilson (SC), Congressman Todd Akin (MO), and Congressman John Kline (MN) – each of whom have had sons serve in Iraq – Congress provided our troops the resources needed for dramatic progress.

How do I know great progress has been made? The newspapers quit writing about it.

Despite clear progress, Democrats in Congress tried to cut or restrict the funding for our troops forty-five different times in the last year. Thanks to conservatives in Congress, they failed forty-five times.

My friends, our nation stands tall on the great progress that has been achieved by General Petraeus and the brave men and women of our armed forces. I would ask that together, we take a minute to honor their sacrifice and their commitment to honor, duty, and country with a loud round of applause.

A more subtle and more encroaching challenge to our liberty is the exponential growth of the size, scope, power, and expense of the federal government. And not surprisingly, Democrats spent the entire year trying to increase the size, scope, power, and expense of the federal government.

As Conservatives, nothing is more sacred to us than our liberty. And each of us knows all too well in our heart, that as government grows, liberty yields. And if you thought that government grew too much under Republican control, permit me to make two observations. One, you're right. Two, when it comes to spending, Republicans are rank amateurs compared to Democrats.

Despite campaign promises of fiscal restraint, in March, the Democrats produced and passed the single largest budget in American history, weighing in at nearly \$3 trillion. To put that in perspective, the federal government, for the first time since World War II, now spends more than \$24,000 per household. How many of you here feel like you've gotten your \$24,000 worth?

That's what I thought.

To make matters worse, Democrats continued to expand and add new entitlement programs to the already overburdened federal budget. By ignoring the unsustainable growth of Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, Democrats not only turned their backs on the \$50 trillion plus unfunded liability of these programs, they turned their backs on the next generation. Because of their efforts, a little girl born today in America automatically inherits a mortgage of almost \$200,000 as she takes her first breath. We are on the verge of being the first generation in American history to leave the next generation with a lower standard of living. As conservatives, we will not sit idly by while Democrats clearly prioritize the next election over the next generation.

And we haven't. Last summer, under the leadership of Congressman John Campbell (CA), the Republican Study Committee began an effort to align a veto-sustaining number of House Members. These Republican members pledged to sustain a veto of ANY appropriations bill that recklessly spent above the level set by the President. And it worked.

Democrat leaders in the House had to cut their desired spending levels in 11 appropriations bills by as much as \$22 billion in additional spending, savings that translate into \$450 billion of YOUR MONEY over ten years. Even by Washington standards, THAT was a good day.

The final threat arises from both increasing the size of the public square in our society and then consequently removing every acknowledgement of God within that square.

Let us recall that inscribed on the hallowed walls of the Jefferson Memorial right across the Potomac are the words:

"Can the liberties of the nation be secure when we have removed the conviction that these liberties are the gifts of God?"

Since we are endowed by our Creator with the inalienable right to liberty, increasing federal restrictions of the mention of His very existence are undoubtedly a threat to our liberty.

In what was the most glaring recent example of the reckless assault on religious liberty from our government, the new Architect of the Capitol unilaterally decided to remove references to God in the certificates that accompany flags flown above the Capitol for constituents.

This secularism run amuck even went so far as to censor the request of a 17-year-old Ohio Eagle Scout who requested that “Old Glory” be flown over the Capitol in honor of his World War II veteran grandfather with a certificate commending him for his “love of God, country and family.” The Architect, who oversees the flag program, decided it was permissible for the boy’s grandfather to love country and family, just not God.

The outrage was overwhelming, spurring my colleague, Republican Study Committee member Mike Turner, to demand that Speaker Pelosi decry and prevent this change. Along with 130 of my colleagues, we launched a vigorous effort to oppose this shameful policy. It was overturned the next day.

These are just a few examples of how, even in the minority, Conservatives successfully helped fight the great challenges that we face as a nation.

Today, however, I want to not just speak of the challenges to our nation, but about a few possible challenges I see within our own conservative movement as well. To some extent, isn’t a look inward what primary season is all about?

Let me first speak of illegal immigration. Without a doubt, illegal immigration is a threat to our national security, our economic security, and the rule of law. We ignore the porous nature of our borders at our own peril. A nation without borders ceases to be a nation.

I think most of us realize that many who cross our border illegally are simply poor people trying to feed their families. My heart goes out to them. As the father of a five year old and a four year old, if I didn’t have a way to feed my children in my native land, I’m not sure you could make the wall tall enough or the razor wire sharp enough to keep me from trying to get into the land of opportunity.

But because our hearts go out to someone, does not mean we can condone or excuse their illegal behavior. It certainly does not mean that we cede control of our borders to thousands whom we do not know from whence they came or for what purpose they enter our country. Although many do enter our country illegally to help feed their families, many others come for the prospect of free healthcare, free housing, and free educational benefits. Others come to push drugs to our children and grandchildren and participate in criminal gangs. And I have no doubt that at least a handful come with hopes of bringing down our passenger airplanes and our office towers.

As a nation, I believe we are debating whether the will exists to control our borders. I believe we are debating whether there is a right way and wrong way to come to America. And I believe we are debating whether American tax dollars should be used to provide benefits to non-Americans who break our laws.

Some, however, try to twist this discussion into one that is harmful for all Americans. These people seek to make this a debate about ethnicity. These people claim that to be FOR border security and the rule of law, you must be AGAINST immigrants. We can not allow them to transform this debate. We must not allow them to win this debate. For if they do, America loses.

As Conservatives, let our voices be clear. We celebrate that America is a nation of immigrants. It always has been and should always remain so. We want to shine up the Statue of Liberty. Liberals want to take it down and erect a statue of welfare in its place.

One of the greatest privileges and honors I've had as a member of Congress took place last year in Garland, Texas, in my congressional district. I was asked to keynote a swearing in ceremony for 95 new American citizens. For me, the ceremony did indeed inspire awe. Let me tell you a few things about these 95 new Americans I was able to welcome into our American family.

Number one, each and every one of them waited five, seven, ten, twelve years to come to America the legal way, the right way, and earn that great privilege of American citizenship. Each one learned the English language, which is the language of opportunity and the language that binds us together as a people. They learned our history, they learned our culture, and I would wager that most of them could do better on an American civics test than many of us here today. After the ceremony, many of these people wanted to have their picture taken with me. I still find it humbling, flattering, and surprising that people want to do that, but they do. I met a young lady who was born in Laos who had come to our shore legally to pursue her American citizenship. I asked her, as is my curious nature, "What was it that made you want to come to America?" She looked me in the eye and gave me a one word answer. And we all know what that answer was, "Freedom."

Though we can not take everybody, it is our heritage and our destiny to welcome those believe in our laws, who love freedom, and those who will roll up their sleeves to work hard to preserve this great land of liberty and opportunity we call America.

Next let me speak of trade, for I fear that we may be witnessing a resurgence of protectionism within our movement.

We have over 200 years of history to teach us that free trade delivers a greater choice of goods and services to American consumers at lower prices. This allows American families to buy MORE using LESS of their hard-earned paychecks. It means more money to make a down payment on a home. To send a child to college. To help a parent with long-term care. It means more freedom and more opportunity.

Increased trade since World War II has helped boost the annual incomes of U.S. residents by over \$10,000 per household. Eliminating all remaining trade barriers could additionally raise U.S. incomes anywhere from \$4,000 to \$12,000 per year.

But beyond all of the economic benefits of trade, we must recognize that fundamentally this is an issue of personal freedom. Nations don't trade with nations, people trade with people. And with the exception of national security considerations, every one of you ought to have the right to determine the origin of the goods and services that YOU want to buy.

How can any Member of Congress go home and tell a hard working school teacher, "No, you can't buy that \$15 sweater from Peru for your little girl, you have to buy that \$31 sweater made in Peoria instead. And if you can't afford it, I'm sorry, but we in Congress decided to protect the factory in Peoria from competition as opposed to protecting your daughter from the winter's cold." Maybe Congress has the power to do that, but does it have the right? I think not.

This is the land of the free. Countless generations have fought and sacrificed for the blessings of liberty, and that includes the economic liberty of trade. To be anti-trade is to be anti-freedom. It's that simple. As conservatives, let us resolve to always stand for freedom and thus stand for trade.

Finally, I'd like to take a few minutes to speak to you about congressional earmarks – an important battle over their proper use is taking place in the Capitol as I speak to you today.

I believe that most of my Republican colleagues have learned the right lessons from the last election. For example, no one expects Democrats to be fiscally responsible. It's not what they do. But they do expect it of Republicans. And although much great work was done in the last Congress, too many opportunities were given to the American people to convince them that Republicans had lost their way on their commitment to limited government and fiscal responsibility. In fact, one of my colleagues shortly after the 2006 election, said, "We have a perception problem." I agreed with him. But, I told him at the time, more importantly, we had a reality problem.

But thanks to new leadership, thanks to more Conservatives within Republican ranks, and thanks to the painful lessons that can only be learned from a dismal election, I believe there is a renewed commitment to the principles of limited government and fiscal responsibility within our ranks. But since much damage was done, much work remains.

If you look at any major, national poll from any reputable pollster, you will see that the GOP trails the Democrats by ten to fifteen points on which party can best be trusted with taxes and spending or the budget and the budget deficit. Remember when we used to lead in those categories by 20 points? I'm sure that Walter Mondale does.

The point is that until and unless those numbers reverse, Republicans can not regain the majority. Unless Republicans regain the majority, Conservatives will never have the opportunity to govern. Thus, the fight on earmarks.

Earmarks are not a new concept. In fact, the discussion about them has gone on since the birth of our republic. In 1796, not even 10 years after the Constitution was ratified, Thomas Jefferson wrote to then Congressman James Madison, about the problem with using federal tax dollars for local post roads:

“I view [such funding] as a source of boundless patronage to the executive, jobbing to members of Congress and their friends, and a bottomless abyss of public money.

You will begin by only appropriating the surplus of the post office revenues; but the other revenues will soon be called into their aid, and it will be a source of eternal scramble among the members, who can get the most money wasted in their State; and they will always get most who are meanest.”

Let's fast forward 200 years. In 1970, the defense appropriations bill had a dozen earmarks and by 1980 that number had crept to 62 earmarks. By 2005, the defense bill had 2,671.

When Republicans took control of Congress in 1995, they cut earmarks by 1/3 to 958. Ten years later, they grew them ten fold and their dollar value more than doubled. In fact, the total number of earmarks has grown from about 300 in 1980 to over 35,000 in the last three years in which Congress has passed a budget.

Now, without a doubt, there are some good and useful earmarks and I have never advocated their total abolition. Although, I might have dreamt about it once or twice.

But for most Americans, the practice of Congressional earmarking as they know it today sadly represents a triumph of seniority over merit, secrecy over transparency, and the special interest over the national interest.

To the American people, earmarks are the poster children of fiscal irresponsibility. They are the kissing cousin to unethical behavior. They are the all too frequent enabler of unlawful acts. Ladies and gentlemen, the American people are right.

Some will try to lessen the importance of earmark reform by claiming that earmarks represent just a little bit of money – less than 1% of the federal budget. I hope that I am never in Washington so long that I consider \$25-30 billion just a “little bit of money.” Regardless, my friends, earmarks have a far greater impact beyond their immediate dollar cost. As my dear friend, Senator Tom Coburn, has said, earmarks are, “a gateway drug on the road to spending addiction.” I agree. On far too many occasions, colleagues have told me, “I know that bill costs way too much, but I had to vote for it because I worked so hard for those earmarks.”

Some within Congress argue against earmark reform, contending that our Constitution jealously guards the power of the purse and the ability for Congress to appropriate money. They say that a loss of Congressional earmarking would surely tilt the balance of power in favor of the executive branch and be an abrogation of our Constitutional duties.

If this argument is valid, then why are 98% of all appropriations NOT earmarked? By their logic, one would assume that Congress has ALREADY abrogated its Constitutional duty. I think not. In fact, Congressional earmark fixation on 2% of the total spending appropriated has significantly compromised the ability of Congress to provide effective oversight to the other 98%.

Furthermore, anytime one of my colleagues speaks to me about preserving “our earmarks,” I remind them of three points:

1. Appropriators comprise 15% of the House but receive nearly 50% of all earmarks;
2. 75% of all earmarks go to elected Congressional leadership, appropriators and politically endangered incumbents;
3. It ain't our money!

The American people are wising up to what all of you in this room already know – the fact that all too often Washington takes a bite out of your paycheck so that some member of Congress can hang on to his.

As our debate continues, some of my colleagues have argued that to reform or lessen earmarks is tantamount to unilateral disarmament. They say that if earmarks are outlawed, only outlaws will have earmarks. Clever line, isn't it? But forgive me if I fail to equate our 2nd Amendment rights with the expenditure of the people's money on an indoor rainforest, a museum earmarked by a Congressman to honor himself, a subsidy to a private airport that doesn't even exit, or a local wine and culinary center. Liberals are about spending the people's money. I thought conservatives were supposed to be about saving it. And even if it were a good thing to spend the peoples' money, with the exception of national defense, Republicans will always be outspent by Democrats.

To my Republican colleagues in Congress, I remind them that we weren't sent to Washington to bring home the bacon, we were sent to make sure that Washington doesn't snatch it from our kitchen tables in the first place. There is no core conservative value to be defended in the Congressional earmarking process. None.

Other colleagues maintain when it comes to spending, we must be focused on the bigger idea of entitlement reform, where the true threat resides. I agree, but unless we first get earmarks right, the people will never trust us with entitlement spending reform, the lack of which threatens the next generation with an immoral and unconscionable tax burden double our own. I suspect that not 1 in 100 Americans understand the true threat of unreformed entitlement spending. I bet though that 99 out of 100 have heard of the Bridge to Nowhere – and they don't like it.

If you don't believe that the American people are knowledgeable about earmarks, just listen to some of newspaper headlines they've been reading over the last few months.

- Pork: The GOP's meat (Tribune Review, Pennsylvania)
- Earmark Analysis Shows Money Follows Power (USA Today)
- Another Year of Earmark Abuses (The OC Register, California)

- Earmarks Could Be Better Spent (Appleton Post, Wisconsin)
- Earmarks: The Height of Hypocrisy (Spartanburg Herald Journal, South Carolina)

Let Democrats defend the status quo. They promised reform, and they have not delivered. They promised transparency. They have not delivered. They promised accountability. They have not delivered. They promised to cut earmarks in half. They have not delivered. The Speaker of the House has told reporters that she would personally choose to “get rid of all of them... None of them is worth the skepticism, the cynicism the public has... and the fiscal responsibility of it.” Instead, she remains among Congress’ top recipients of pork.

Under Democrat control, the American people have grown increasingly suspicious of a system that gives the appearance of campaign cash going into one end of Washington and taxpayer funded earmarks coming out the other end. As the Roll Call Newspaper recently wrote about Congressman John Murtha (D-PA):

“Every private entity that Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.) favored with an earmark in this year’s defense bill recently has given political money to the lawmaker, according to an analysis of House Appropriations and federal elections records.... PACs and employees of those 26 groups together have contributed \$413,250 to Murtha since the beginning of 2005.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, Republicans have called on Democrats to declare a moratorium on earmarks, to select a bi-partisan panel to reform the process, and to declare many current earmark practices forbidden. The call has been met by ridicule and indifference from Democrats.

Conservatives must seize the moment. We must encourage Republicans in Congress to show America that Republicans are different – dramatically different than Democrats who defend the status quo. I call upon all of my Republican colleagues to join me in an earmark moratorium, to end earmarks as we know them, to only request funding for projects that serve the national interest and that truly comport with our vision of Constitutional and limited government. By so doing, we can begin to reclaim the Republican Party’s rightful brand of fiscal responsibility, respect our core values, and gain the moral authority necessary to cure our nation’s fiscal ills. Thus, we will keep faith with our forefathers and be good stewards for the next generation’s birthright.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great hope that as Republicans, we see each of these challenges as opportunities for conservative action. As opportunities to make clear how different our vision is from that of our Democratic opponents. As an opportunity to unite as a family as we have done so many times before.

For it is often that the courage to remain true to our cause will guide us in what may sometimes seem as the most doubtful of times. And I realize that for variety of reasons, many in our movement feel like we are in a time of doubt. Just over 30 years ago, a twice failed candidate for President came to this very forum at a moment in which many

were openly questioning the future of our party. Though others might have been discouraged by defeat in what was no doubt a difficult time for the conservative movement, this man – this leader – knew that in order to achieve our goals, we must unite and be bold. In 1975, Ronald Wilson Reagan came before this audience and said:

Our people look for a cause to believe in. Is it a third party we need, or is it a new and revitalized second party, raising a banner of no pale pastels, but bold colors which make it unmistakably clear where we stand on all of the issues troubling the people?

My friends, we've been blessed with the opportunity to stand for our beliefs — for faith, for family, for free enterprise, and for freedom. To apply our principals to the challenges facing 21st Century American families. We know the right thing to do. We know that these are the principles that are worth our efforts, worth our fight, and worth devoting our lives to.

Yesterday would have been President Reagan's 97th birthday. And though he has been called home by our Lord, his love for our nation, his optimism for its future, and his belief in our movement serve as an eternal reminder of our mission. As conservatives, let us resolve to be bold. Let us resolve to remain optimistic in the face of difficult challenges. And let us resolve to go forward with an unbreakable unity to revitalize our party with bold colors.

God Bless you and God Bless America.